

Bird's-eye View



Conserving
bird habitat
for over
80
years

MAY 2011

Mark your calendars!
ILLINOIS SPRING BIRD COUNT
SAT. MAY 7, 2011

Newsletter of The Peoria Audubon Society. . . Chapter of National Audubon since 1981

Chapter of The Peoria Academy of Science since 1930

www.peoriaaudubon.org

Contact the Peoria Audubon Society at audubon@peoriaaudubon.org

Peoria Audubon meets at 7:00 PM on the second Wednesday of each month, September through May at the Forest Park Nature Center (FPNC). It's a relaxed, friendly evening with an interesting presentation followed by refreshments. Free and open to the public.

These are just a few of the upcoming events listed at
www.peoriaaudubon.org/calendar

Sat., May 7th, 2011

Illinois Spring Bird Count

The State wide bird count of all 102 counties in Illinois. The participants record all birds seen or heard, along with the number of hours they spend "owling" (pre-dawn hours), the number of hours spent looking for birds during the day, the number of miles driven in a car, and the number of miles walked. To volunteer in Peoria County, contact: Mike Miller (309) 681-2858; in Tazewell Co.: Thad Edmonds (309) 243-1854

Sat. May 7, 2011, 8am - 3pm

Migratory Bird Day & Things with Wings

Wildlife Prairie State Park's Migratory Bird Day. Guided Hikes, local artists, children's crafts, owl pelleting dissecting, scavenger hunt, guest speakers.

Wed. May 11, 2011, 7PM

Monthly Membership Meeting

Brian "Fox" Ellis of Fox Tales International will be providing an educational encounter with the earth's wildest places. Through the ancient art of storytelling, "Fox" will leave you inspired as he becomes the persona of "John James Audubon," celebrating the 200th anniversary of his arrival in Kentucky.

May 13 - 15, 2011

Cranes, Moraines and Audubon: Migrate North for Spring



Illinois Audubon Spring Gathering will be held at the Holiday Inn Crystal Lake, 800 S Route 31, Crystal Lake, IL 60014. Hosted by McHenry County Audubon Society.

Field Trips, Programs, Banquet, Silent Auction and Raffle. More information at:
<http://www.illinoisaudubon.org>

FPNC = Forest Park Nature Center,
5809 N. Forest Park Drive, Peoria Heights

Sat., Jul. 30, 2011

Jubilee Prairie Dawgs of Local Prairie

Join Doug Franks of the Jubilee Prairie Dawgs on a tour of local prairies managed by the group including the Brimfield RR Prairie Nature Preserve owned by the Peoria Audubon Society. Contact Doug Franks at (309) 691-7993 for more information on the tour.

Sat., Aug. 20, 2011, 7 AM - 4 PM

Birding Tour of the Illinois River

Catch the peak of shorebird migration with this field trip led by Maury Brucker, of Peoria Audubon Society, and Mike Miller, of Forest Park Nature Center. Destination includes Emiquon, Lake Chautauqua, Rice lake, Banner Marsh and other great birding spots along the Illinois River south of Peoria.

Trip includes transportation in a Park District, 15-passenger van and a catered lunch. Pre-registration required. Register early as this trip fills up fast. Best for 12 and up. Forest Park Nature Center and/or Peoria Audubon Members receive a \$5 discount. Call Peoria Park District at 686-3360 for more info and registration. Fee: \$35.

Sat., Aug. 27, 2011, 9 AM - 12 PM

Hummingbird Festival at FPNC

Vernon Kleen from Springfield (one of the two licensed hummingbird banders in Illinois) will demonstrate hummingbird banding and discuss the fascinating world of hummingbirds. You will have a chance to feel the heartbeat of a hummingbird and "adopt" one of these beautiful flyers with a donation to the Illinois Audubon habitat acquisition fund. This free event is a come-as-you-please activity. Jointly sponsored by Forest Park Nature Center and Illinois Audubon. Fee: FREE, donations greatly appreciated.

Wed. Sept. 14, 2011, 7PM

Monthly Membership Meeting

Program to be Announced.



Learn More: Scan the adjacent code with your smart phone to connect with the Peoria Audubon Event Calendar

A Note from our President

Feral Cat Legislation in Illinois

by Dennis Endicott

New Report Analyzes the Impact of Feral Cat Predation on Birds and Other Wildlife

As I was perusing through a number of conservation-related articles, I came across a new report that provides data, from peer-reviewed, science-based research, on what has become an emotional, hot-button topic in many communities. The data also runs counter to proposed legislation in Illinois: HB 240 to allow trap/neuter/release of feral cats.

The new, peer-reviewed study, *Feral Cats and Their Management* by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, analyzes existing research on management of the burgeoning U.S. feral cat population – over 60 million and counting – including the controversial practice of Trap, Neuter, Release (TNR).

"This report is a must-read for any community or government official wondering what to do about feral cats. It encapsulates the extensive research on this subject and draws conclusions based on that data. Not surprisingly, the report validates everything American Bird Conservancy has been saying about the feral cat issue for many years, namely that TNR doesn't work in controlling feral cat populations," said Darin Schroeder, Vice President for Conservation Advocacy for ABC.

"Communities seeking a solution to their feral cat problems need to consider the science on the issue and the full humane picture. Birds and other native animals don't deserve to die at the hands of a predator introduced into their environment by irresponsible pet owners. A humane decision-making process on this issue must also recognize that feral cats live short, miserable lives because of disease, other predators, severe weather and traffic hazards. Their life expectancy is less than one third that of owned cats," Schroeder added.

As a result of these findings, the report authors stated that they do not recommend TNR as a method to control feral cats. In their extensive research, they were unable to find a single real-world example of TNR succeeding in eliminating a feral cat colony.

...continued on page 2



Feral Cat Legislation in Illinois, continued from page 1 ...

Some of the many findings of the report include:

- Feral cats are invasive and pose a threat to native fauna and public health.
- Three separate studies showed that 62 to 80 percent of feral cats carry the parasite responsible for toxoplasmosis – a condition of special concern to pregnant women.
- Feral cats impacts to birds can be calculated at 17 billion dollars per year.
- Feeding feral cats increases the chances of diseases being transmitted.
- Cats are responsible for the extinction of at least 33 species of birds.
- Feral cats kill an estimated 480 million birds in the U.S. each year.
- Cats kill far more native wildlife species than invasive species.
- Cats will kill wildlife no matter how well they are fed.
- The life expectancy of a feral cat is 3-5 years as opposed to 15 years for owned cats.

I can empathize with the concern to do something over leaving stray animals on the street. But according to the data, Trap/Neuter/Release programs do not address the causes or alleviate the problem. Without any benefits, Trap/Neuter/Release consumes significant assets that could be used to address the root causes. Owners must be responsible by keeping their cats on their property and having them spayed or neutered.

Illinois defines a feral cat as: "Feral cat means a cat that is (i) born in the wild or is the offspring of an owned or feral cat and is not socialized, or (ii) is a formerly owned cat that has been abandoned and is no longer socialized or lives on a farm." The later part, which defines a feral cat as one who simply lives on a farm, likely eliminates the long-standing role of "barn cats" who aid farmers by eliminating rodents.

Unfortunately, with cats surpassing dogs as America's favorite pet, the burden has fallen to local governments to implement measures to control unwanted and roaming cats. This has sometimes led to community conflicts and drastic consequences for free-roaming cats. Most people recognize the key is responsible pet ownership, achieved through proper immunization and sterilization of feline companions. Laws, whether state or local, can only operate at the reactionary level; owners must take proactive measures.

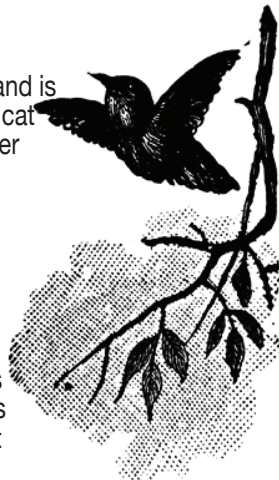


photo by D. Endicott

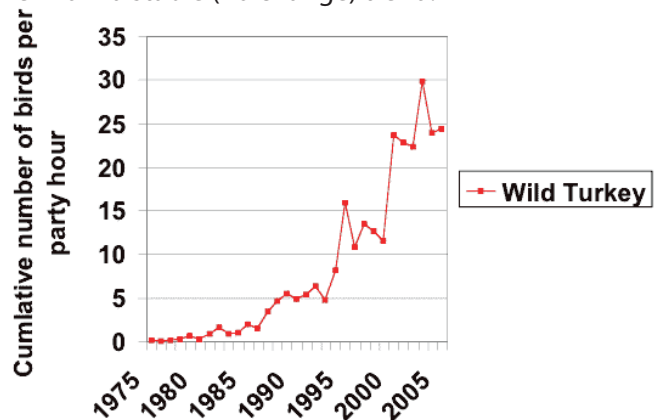


Illinois Spring Bird Count Saturday May 7, 2011

The Illinois Spring Bird Count was initiated by Vernon Kleen of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources in 1975. This bird count consists of volunteers conducting bird censuses on the Saturday that falls between May 4th and May 10th. The censuses are conducted in all 102 counties in Illinois, however in any given year a few counties are not censused. The participants record all birds seen or heard, along with the number of hours they spend "owling" (pre-dawn hours), the number of hours spent looking for birds during the day, the number of miles driven in a car, and the number of miles walked.

The Illinois Natural History Survey provides a website to allow both the thousands of volunteers, and other interested parties with the ability to view the 30+ years of data. Check out: <http://www.inhs.uiuc.edu/databases/sbc/about.html>

The data generated from the Spring Bird Count can be used to estimate changes in populations of species throughout the state. Because of the nature of the data, declines or increases in certain species population trends may not accurately reflect true changes in populations and statistical tests should be preformed to determine if observed trends differ from a stable (no change) trend.



Sample INHS Spring Bird Count Data available online.

Join the Peoria Audubon Society along with thousands of other volunteers across the state. In Peoria County, contact: Mike Miller (309) 681-2858; in Tazewell County: Thad Edmonds (309) 243-1854. No experience necessary. Unexperienced birders will be paired with experienced birders.

A Turkey Vulture boards an airplane with two dead racoons. The stewardess reprimands the bird, "I'm sorry, but passengers are only allowed one carry on!"



Bird a Day offers a new challenge in bird-watching

by Jim Wright

If you're a birder, chances are that you like to keep lists — of birds you've seen in your yard, in your life, in a year, or all of the above.

So my curiosity was piqued when I heard of a whole new kind of bird list. It's called Bird a Day, and it's incredibly simple but beguilingly difficult.

The goal is to see how many days in a row you can see a different species of bird. It may seem easy, but friends who have tried it say that some days it's a real challenge to keep the streak going.

Bird a Day is a great way to expand your bird-watching horizons. If you don't improve your abilities or visit new birding spots, you'll use up grackle, cardinal and other backyard regulars pretty quickly.

Bird a Day was invented by avid Massachusetts bird-watcher Tom Wetmore several years back. The competition traditionally begins on New Year's Day — but more on that later.



The first contest, in 2008, was won by an avian biologist in Texas who lasted until Nov. 12 (317 days). In 2009, fellow Texan Tad Finnell made it all the way to Dec. 31.

Floridian Trey Mitchell, who created the Bird a Day website (BirdaDay.net), assures me the annual competition is friendly:

"There is really no way to have an even set of circumstances to be a real competition. We pull for and assist each other. Some take it a

little more serious than others, and that's OK. If you want to fly around the world looking, more power to you."

Lyndhurst resident Chris Takacs told me about Bird a Day last year, when he managed to find a new bird species each day for 254 days. He lasted all the way to the Meadowlands Festival of Birding in September, when a whimbrel along the Hackensack River was his last new bird.

"I was attracted to this because I thought it would make birding just a little more interesting, a little more challenging," says Chris, a volunteer with Friends of Garret Mountain Reservation in Woodland Park.

Occasional business trips help him increase his variety of species. This year he is still going strong. "Right now I'm just trying to get through until April 15," he says. "That's the beginning of a 45-day window when 70 to 90 species [are] moving through, and you've got a lot more choices."

Another friend, Rene Ebersole, an editor at Audubon magazine, ran out of new birds last week. "I made it to day 80, the first day of spring, and I heard a pileated woodpecker calling from a Vermont sugar bush," she says. "Unfortunately, the next day back at home was wet and rainy, and I had used up all my common feeder birds."

Bird a Day is especially challenging in the Northeast because birds can be scarce in the winter, when the competition begins. But who says you have to start on Jan. 1? What better day to start than Friday, April Fool's Day? With plenty of migratory birds arriving in coming weeks, you might have a nice little run.

Rene offers this advice to anyone who's up for the challenge: "Look and listen, all the time." Spoken like a true birder.

Got birding-related questions or comments? E-mail Jim at wrightjamesb@gmail.com. His latest book is "Ghosts of Allendale." Jim's nature blog is celeryfarm.net.

HUMMINGBIRD FESTIVAL SAT. AUG. 27, 2011

FOREST PARK NATURE CENTER



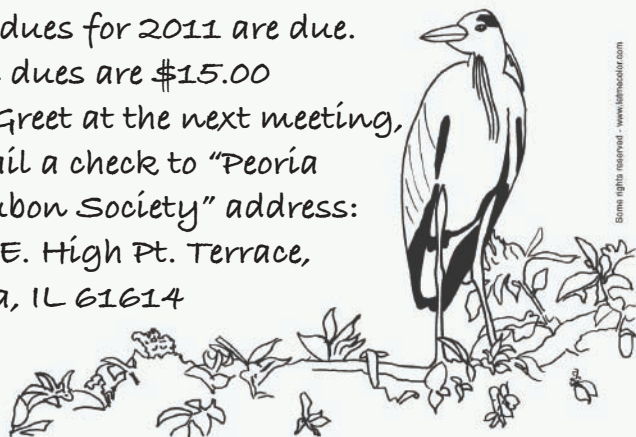
Hummingbird festivals offer an up-close view of these amazing, tiny little birds as Vernon Kleen, Master Permit Bander and member of the IAS Board of Directors, captures and bands the birds during the festival.

Banding helps determine how far into Mexico or Central America the birds go for the winter, where they stop during their travels, how long they live, and whether they come back to the same sites year after year. Kleen reports that birds banded in Illinois have been found in Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Texas.

Attendees at IAS Hummingbird Festivals "adopt" hummingbirds by making a \$5 donation to the Illinois Audubon Society's land acquisition fund; this fund is earmarked for the protection of Illinois wildlife habitat. Donors will receive an attractive, signed certificate, be given the privilege of releasing their adopted bird, and will be notified if their bird is ever recaptured.

Peoria Hummingbird Festival will be August 27 (9:00 am to noon) Forest Park Nature Center.

A note from our Treasurer:
Greet Princen reminds us that
local dues for 2011 are due.
Local dues are \$15.00
Pay Greet at the next meeting,
or mail a check to "Peoria
Audubon Society" address:
677 E. High Pt. Terrace,
Peoria, IL 61614



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PEORIA ACADEMY OF SCIENCE
677 E HIGH PT TERRACE
PEORIA IL 61614

BIRD A DAY CHALLENGE

Inside:

When does your annual membership expire?

Check the
date on your
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Conservation

Audubon Reports: Oil Persists, and So Do Concerns about Birds

New York, NY -

One year after the BP oil disaster began in the Gulf of Mexico, Audubon experts report that oil can still be found in gulf marshes and beaches that provide critical habitat for at-risk birds. Recent trips through Louisiana's Barataria Bay revealed tar balls on beaches and oil oozing through marsh grasses, a discouraging sight as the breeding season begins for dozens of Gulf Coast bird species.

"Irresponsible and negligent is how we described BP last year. The same is true for Congress now. It's been nearly a year and we're still waiting for Congress to make sure that BP penalty fines will be used to clean up BP's mess," said David Yarnold, Audubon President and CEO. "The oil disaster dealt a devastating blow to wildlife and communities, it is time to put politics aside and do the right thing for the Gulf."

Oil and natural gas gushed into the Gulf for three months before the well was finally capped in July. By then, the region had endured the largest oil spill in U.S. history. Oil reached all Gulf states and washed up along a thousand miles of U.S. coastline, including 17 Important Bird Areas. Birds, other wildlife, habitats, and communities all suffered – and continue to suffer.

As we begin a new breeding season, there's still lots of oil in places where many species of birds nest and feed, said Melanie Driscoll, Audubon's Director of Bird Conservation for the Gulf. "As species like Wilson's Plover and Least Tern return to their traditional breeding grounds, they are coming into contact with oil again, which poses many health risks to them and their young."

Oil can also harm birds by affecting their food sources. Birds could go hungry if oil or cleanup activities reduce availability of prey such as fish, marine worms, oysters and crustaceans (including shrimp and crabs).

Additionally, damaging compounds from oil work their way through the food web with potential impacts on birds' overall health and reproductive success. In March, Audubon staff found marine worms burrowing in tar balls on Grande Terre, Louisiana. Laboratory analysis of the tar balls, led by researchers at Millsaps College, showed concentrations of hydrocarbons that can enter the food web through organisms like the worms and can pose long-term health risks for adult birds or fatalities or birth defects in developing bird embryos.

Ongoing Audubon monitoring work on the Gulf Coast and nationwide is providing scientists and policymakers with long term data to decipher the effects of the disaster. This includes a Coastal Bird Survey which was launched during the spill, and trend analysis of Gulf Christmas Bird Count data which will help assess impacts over time. Meanwhile, Audubon continues its longstanding work to address the multiple threats to the health of those ecosystems. Learn more at <http://gulfoilspill.audubon.org/cleanup-and-restoration>

